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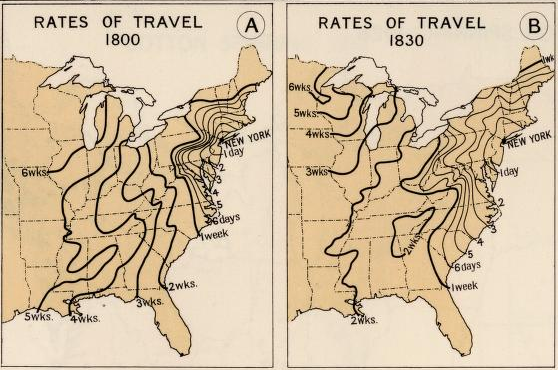
**Railroads as a catalyst for growth**

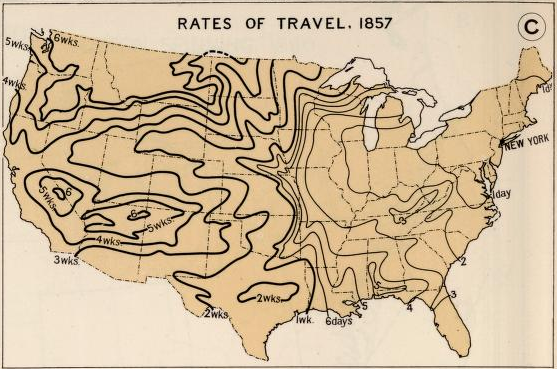
Around the time of the Civil War, Chicago had emerged as an economic center. The city’s position in the middle of the country made it the railroad depot of the mid-continent, the center of an intricate web of railroad lines. Everything produced or harvested in the nation’s interior reached markets via a distribution network located in Chicago. The railroad was an important link in this system ensuring the timely delivery of valuable products.

Extraordinary amounts of lumber, grain and wheat traveled to the city by railroads and were transported out of Chicago by boat. By the late 1850s, Illinois was the largest producer of grain in the country and the leading lumber market in the world. Wheat production was exploding to the west, and northern Wisconsin and Michigan offered timber-rich forests.

Farmers in the past had transported their goods by wagon. They quickly realized the extensive benefits of this new, faster, rail-based mode of transportation. As Chicago’s rail lines expanded, wheat arrived in the city in quantities that surpassed those moved via the canal and wagons combined. The railroads revolutionized the way the economic system worked and offered endless possibilities for additional growth.

Chicago’s rail expansion diminished the economic influence of St. Louis in the Mississippi River trading territory. Located on the Great Lakes, Chicago possessed a clear geographical advantage. The canal access to the interior added another dimension ensuring the city’s direct connection to the east. These realities sealed St. Louis’s fate and propelled Chicago to the forefront. The city now possessed all the necessary elements for modern development.





1. According to the reading, how did Chicago (indicated by the star on the maps), benefit by its geographical location?
2. On Maps A, B, and C what is city is the “starting point” of the journey?
3. Each line on these maps are intended to represent what?
4. As the lines spread out (more space between them), what does that indicate?
5. How long would it take to get from New York to Chicago in 1800? Why do you think it would take so long?
6. Roughly, a one-hour drive today would equal the maximum travel in a day in 1800. Would that make goods more expensive or less expensive? Explain.
7. How long would it take to get from New York to Chicago in 1830? What changes do you think decreased the amount of time needed?
8. How long would it take to get from New York to Chicago in 1857? What changes do you think decreased the amount of time needed?
9. What secondary advantage did Chicago (the star) have over Saint Louis (the triangle) as both had major railway systems?
10. Does this map explain how Chicago became the second largest city in the United States? Explain why or why not.

